

2008 SOUTHWEST NAHRO AWARDS SUBMISSION
FORT WORTH HOUSING AUTHORITY
Assisted Housing Newsletter

1. **SUMMARY OF PROGRAM:** In order to effectively communicate basic information to its 5,000+ clients and 1,200+ vendors in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and Special Programs departments, the Assisted Housing division of the Fort Worth Housing Authority developed a newsletter, "Assisted Housing Happenings", to address both populations, providing information from each department of the division. Staff was able to see a difference in the number of calls / messages to the wrong personnel, fewer calls asking questions about basic program guidelines, and an increase in clients expressing interest in the HCV Homeownership Program.
2. **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM:** Clients and landlords often call to ask questions about basic program guidelines, as well as leaving messages with the wrong staff person. With a large volume of calls received daily, employees spend time communicating the same remedial information several times a day, using valuable man-hours in the process. In addition, HUD often requires notification of an entire population regarding changes in regulations and guidelines, necessitating a mass mail-out.

A newsletter was developed by the Director of Assisted Housing that would speak to the issue, providing both clients and landlords with information from each department of the division, answering questions regarding basic program guidelines, updating HUD guidelines in key areas, and including a current staff directory in each publication. The directory includes all staff in Assisted Housing and is broken down by each department: Assisted Housing Executive Office, Homeownership/Family Self Sufficiency (FSS), Admissions, HCV, Inspections, Special Programs and fax numbers. This directory enables clients and landlords to keep accurate and current information on staff at hand, and saves them the trouble of seeking names and numbers from the agency voice mail directory.

Each department submits an article briefly explaining procedures / guidelines / contact information, such as a list of Housing Quality Standard Inspectors and the zip codes in which they operate, reminders to clients on reporting requirements, notices of Landlord Orientations, Homeownership and FSS information, the opening and closing of the HCV wait list, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), etc. All information is designed to assist both clients and landlords as well as speaking to each population separately regarding applicable guidelines. In addition, agencies in partnership with FWHA may also have information published that is of interest to clients, landlord, and staff. While not completely eliminating the dissemination of incorrect or invalid information from one to the other, the newsletter provides some alleviation of this problem as well as a written reference for future use. Since the project is on-going, it is anticipated providing continued information will educate long-term clients and landlords, who in turn give accurate information to newcomers.

Supervisors and their staff are given about 2 weeks to submit timely articles about their individual departments / programs. Another week is spent formatting and editing the final product before submitting to the printer.

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3. **THE RESULTS / SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM:** Success with the newsletter continues as the volume of calls decreases and calls are routed to the correct staff. The education of clients and landlords is increasing as well. Another bonus is sharing information within the Housing Authority and educating staff in different areas and departments.
4. **THE COST / FINANCING OF THE PROGRAM:** Cost of the newsletter varies from around \$3300 – \$2800. The variable is due to an ever-changing number of newsletters being mailed based on client participation which affects the cost of postage. Printing companies are chosen by bid. The cost of printing includes the printer doing the mail-out. The newsletter itself is a line item in the Assisted Housing administrative budget. Extra copies are distributed agency-wide and given to all new landlords in vendor packets and at orientation, so very few are wasted. Currently, the publication is on glossy paper with two-color ink. If necessary, the quality of paper and number of colored inks can be changed for a lesser cost.
5. **INNOVATION:** Publishing a newsletter that consistently focuses on providing information for both clients and landlords so they can see the issues and concerns of the other group.